

Society of Midland Authors Announces 2026 Award Winners and Honorees

April 16, 2026 — The Society of Midland Authors today announced its annual awards, honoring its choices for the best books by Midwestern authors published in 2025. In each category, a panel of literary judges chose a winner as well as honorees whose work was also deemed worthy of recognition. The winners and honorees will be recognized at an awards dinner on May 12 in Chicago.

ADULT FICTION AWARD

WINNER:

J.R. Dawson, *The Lighthouse at the Edge of the World*, Tor. (Author lives in Minneapolis.)

HONOREES:

— Joan Corwin, *Hindsight*, Serving House. (Author lives in Evanston, Illinois.)

— Peter Geye, *A Lesser Light*, University of Minnesota Press. (Author lives in Minneapolis.)

— Joseph O'Malley, *Starlight and Moonshine*, Delphinium. (Author was born and raised in Detroit and now lives in New York.)

The judges for Adult Fiction were Patricia Skalka, Kathie Giorgio, and Barbara Shoup.

RICHARD FRISBIE AWARD FOR ADULT NONFICTION

WINNER:

Michael T. Osterholm and Mark Olshaker, *The Big One: How We Must Prepare for Future Deadly Pandemics*, Little, Brown Spark. (Osterholm lives in Minneapolis; Olshaker lives in the Washington, D.C., area.)

HONOREES:

— Áine Cain and Kevin Greenlee, *Shadow of the Bridge: The Delphi Murders and the Dark Side of the American Heartland*, Pegasus Crime. (The authors live in Fishers, Indiana.)

— Dylan Taylor-Lehman, *Going Rackless: Chicago's Amateur Pool Players and the Quest for Glory in the Biggest Tournament in the World*, 3 Fields/University of Illinois Press. (Author is from Ohio and lived in Chicago while working on this book; he now lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.)

The judges for Adult Nonfiction were Gerry Plecki, Chris Lynch, and Susan Croce Kelly.

HISTORY AWARD

WINNER:

Willa Hammitt Brown, *Gentlemen of the Woods: Manhood, Myth, and the American Lumberjack*, University of Minnesota Press. (Author lives in Minneapolis.)

HONOREES:

— Sean Rost, *Catching Hell From All Quarters: Anti-Klan Activists in Interwar Missouri*, University of Missouri Press. (Author lives in Jefferson City, Missouri.)

— Mary Annette Pember, *Medicine River: A Story of Survival and the Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools*, Pantheon. (Author lives in Cincinnati.)

The judges for History were Joseph Gustaitis, Greg Borzo, and David Witter.

POETRY AWARD

WINNER:

Greg Rappleye, *Barley Child*, University of Arkansas Press. (Author lives in Grand Haven, Michigan.)

HONOREES:

— David W. Berner, *Garden Tools*, Finishing Line Press. (Author lives in Clarendon Hills, Illinois.)

— Paul Martinez Pompa, *Domestic Corpse*, Match Factory Editions. (Author lives in Elmhurst, Illinois.)

— Fleda Brown, *The End of the Clockwork Universe*, Carnegie Mellon University Press. (Author lives in Traverse City, Michigan.)

The judges for Poetry were Westley Heine, Ah Hee Lee, and John Kropf.

BERNARD BROMMEL AWARD FOR BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR

WINNER:

Beth Macy, *Paper Girl: A Memoir of Home and Family in a Fractured America*, Penguin Press. (Author grew up in Urbana, Ohio.)

HONOREES:

— B.J. Hollars, *Dinosaur Dreams: A Father and Daughter in Search of America's Prehistoric Past*, University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books. (Author lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.)

— David Hakensen, *Her Place in the Woods: The Life of Helen Hoover*, University of Minnesota Press. (Author lives in Corcoran, Minnesota.)

— Maggie Andersen, *No Stars in Jefferson Park*, Northwestern University Press. (Author lives in Chicago.)

The judges for Biography and Memoir were Bob Remer, Marlene Targ Brill, and Jean Iversen.

CHILDREN'S FICTION AWARD

WINNER:

John Sullivan, *Can I Keep It, Please?* Beach Lane. (Author lives in Chicago.)

HONOREES:

— Janna Matthies, *Baby, Let's Go to the Orchestra!* Creative Company. (Author lives in Indianapolis.)

— Sue Harrison, *Rescuing Crash, the Good Dog*, Modern History Press. (Author lives in Pickford, Michigan.)

— Darcy Day Zoells, *Smithy & Me*, Clavis Publishing. (Author lives in Chicago.)

The judges for Children's Fiction were Sandra Renner, Laura Hirshfield, and Rick Telander.

CHILDREN'S READING ROUND TABLE AWARD FOR CHILDREN'S NONFICTION WINNER:

Laurie Lawlor, *Many Voices: Building Erie, the Canal That Changed America*, Holiday House. (Author lives in Evanston, Illinois.)

HONOREES:

— Ruth Spiro, *How to Explain Climate Science to a Grown-Up*, Charlesbridge. (Author lives in Deerfield, Illinois.)

— Katie Venit, *Cassini's Mission: A Spacecraft, a Tiny Moon, and the Search for Life Beyond Earth*, MIT Kids Press. (Author lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.)

— Margi Preus, *Snowshoe Kate and the Hospital Built for Pennies*, Harry N. Abrams. (Author lives in Duluth, Minnesota.)

The judges for Children's Nonfiction were Judith Schein Cohen, Pat Kummer, and Michelle Houts.

Congratulations to all authors and publishers on submitting such an outstanding field of publications. This year's winners will receive a \$750 award and a recognition plaque.

The annual awards dinner will take place Tuesday, May 12, at the Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago, which features a beautiful view of Lake Michigan and Millennium Park. The reception with cash bar begins at 6 p.m. followed by the dinner and awards ceremony at 7 p.m. The emcee will be Justin Kaufmann of Axios.

Tickets are \$95 each. Reservations can be made with PayPal at <https://midlandauthors.org/awards-banquet-2026/> or by mailing a reservation form and check to: Dinner Reservations, Society of Midland Authors, c/o Tom Frisbie, 12 S. Owen St., Mount Prospect, IL 60056. Attendees will have the opportunity to take home free copies of some of the winning and honored books.

The Society, founded in 1915 by a group of authors including Hamlin Garland, Harriet Monroe, and Vachel Lindsay, has given out annual awards since 1957. The juried competition is open to authors who live in, were born in, or have strong ties to Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, or Wisconsin.

Notable winners have included Saul Bellow, Kurt Vonnegut, Studs Terkel, Gwendolyn Brooks, Mike Royko, Jane Smiley, Dempsey Travis, Leon Forrest, William Maxwell, Louise Erdrich, Scott Turow, Alex Kotlowitz, Aleksandar Hemon, Stuart Dybek, Roger Ebert, and Jonathan Eig.

Members of the media may contact Gerry Plecki, competition coordinator and past president of the SMA, with any questions at: gplecki@travel-brokers.com.